fr. Mrs. Butterworth.

The Communion of Saints.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY THE

REVEREND MORGAN DIX, S. T. D.,

Rector of Trinity Church, New York,

IN THE

Free Church of S. Mary-the-Virgin,

WEST 45TH STREET,

Between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, New York,

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WHEN, at the request of some of the parishioners of S. MARY-THE-VIRGIN, a few hundred copies of this Sermon were printed for their comfort and instruction, it was not anticipated that such a need as has been since developed, existed in the public mind and heart.

Aside from the exalted position of the Reverend Father from whose lips these words of consolation and advice have fallen—words which are the reflex of his own holy life--that secret and unspoken need of unnumbered sorrowing hearts has created a demand for these pages which could not be unheeded.

With this edition will be completed the FIFTEENTH THOUSAND that have been printed in one form and another, and gratuitously distributed here and elsewhere, among those who still cling to the memory of, and refuse to believe in even a present separation from, those who "have departed this life in HIS Faith and Fear," and who still "walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

CHURCH OF S. MARY-THE-VIRGIN,

New York, Holy Week, 1872.

✝ S. G. M. Dec. 11, 1870. In Pace.

Psalm CXVI., 9.

"I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

These are the words with which an Office begins, anciently used for the commemoration of the Faithful Departed. They seem to form the glad utterance of those Holy Dead who, though gone from our sight, are yet alive. "I will walk before the Lord," though the earthly house of this tabernacle contain my spirit no longer. I shall be "in the land of the living," though seen no more by the inhabitants of the world. It is the song of faith and trust, on the lips of those who, because they believe in Christ, "shall never die."

I have chosen these words for a text or legend, to be placed at the beginning of this discourse, in view of circumstances peculiar to the occasion. This is an hour when the hearts of many here present are full of tender emotions. One year ago to-day, Almighty God was pleased to take out of this world a soul, which

He had purified through suffering. Patient, humble, and resigned; having that clear view of the truth as it is in Jesus, which makes eternal things very near and very precious; firm in that indomitable faith which overcometh the world; crucified indeed with Christ through long wasting illness, and most bitter anguish of body; made ready by our Heavenly Father's loving discipline, for her own place in the tranquil home above; she went to that home in peace, fearlessly descending into the dark valley through which we pilgrims reach it, and seeing, perhaps, the light beyond. The remembrance of that gracious and lovely daughter of the Church; so earnest, so pure, so full of compassion for the suffering and needy, so lowly in heart towards GOD, so true to every duty of her station, and each responsibility of her rank: that remembrance is in our hearts this hour; it stills the rude or idle voices of the world, and speaks to us of another and a better life. Meanwhile loving hands have reared, in this church, a memorial; an Altar with which her name shall ever be associated; the centre and shrine of the pure spiritual worship of the Church. What memorial could be so appropriate as this? Where else could that pure, sweet spirit which, having meekly borne the cross, now walks before the LORD in the land of the living, be so affectionately remembered as there, where the solemn memorial before GOD is made day by day, where the Passion of the LORD is constantly shown forth, and

pleaded before Heaven; where we are taught, as nowhere else, the love of God, and the power of the cross; and where the true worshippers are fed with that Bread which, whoso eateth worthily shall have eternal life? "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." This seems to be spoken to us from afar, in a voice which has been still for a twelve-month, on this side of the vail. And now the voice wakes a response even here, as we think of those holy mysteries, and of that blessed sacrament, wherein "angels and living saints and dead," are brought near together, and by which we all are one in the Body of Christ.

But to proceed to the main design of this discourse. The circumstances and the hour combine to turn our thoughts to one of the articles of the Christian Faith; an article perhaps not perfectly understood, and in itself difficult and obscure. "I believe in the Communion of Saints." The words express many relations, many mysteries; they stand for a great network of complicated, involved, confusing, but most precious and blessed truths. Of these our minds and hearts ought to be full; yet we do not comprehend them; we think of them but seldom; and through the unbelief and impiety of this age, many of them are to us as empty words without reality. Let me try, dear brethren, to speak, briefly, on this great subject, on which whoso is well informed and often meditates must needs grow to be an

unworldly, grave and thoughtful man: for these are terms which bring the visible and invisible worlds very close together; nay, which make them overlap each other's boundaries, and extend as it were into one another. First, as to the meaning of the words: "Saint" is the translation of the Latin *Sanctus;* it means Holy: and "Communion" is intimate relationship, alliance and intercourse. In affirming our belief in this article of the Creed, we profess to believe, then, in the existence and certainty of relationships between Holy Beings; and moreover in relationships so strange, so unearthly and so mysterious, that they are properly the subject of that Faith which is the "evidence of things not seen."

Who then are they amongst whom these relations exist? Let us enumerate them in order, following in the steps of theologians and doctors of the church.

First of all is the Holy One, GOD Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. When we pass, secondly, from the Infinite to the Finite; there are first, the Holy Angels; secondly, the souls of the Dead; and thirdly, the Holy Servants of GOD here on earth. These three classes include all those intelligent creatures of the LORD in whom His Grace still dwells, and upon whom His Light is still shining. Now the Christian professes to believe that relations exist among all these, whereby they are wonderfully allied and linked together. GOD and the Angels: GOD and the blessed

souls at rest; GOD and we poor pilgrims; He has communion with us all, and we with Him. Again, among us His creatures, there are mutual relations; the Angels with us; we with each other; we with the departed who have gone on before; and perchance Angels also with them; thus again have we and they communion with each other in GOD. How numerous and how intricate are these connections! How they differ in clearness! Some are so plain that nothing need be said about them; others so mysterious that they lie in the region of conjecture. They might be classified as the known, the unknown and the known in part. The known (I mean, of course, so far as we can be said to know anything in our imperfect state) are the relations of GOD to us, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier; His relations to the Angels, as their Lord and King, who maketh His Angels spirits, and His ministers a Flame of Fire; the relation of the Angels to us, as our guardians, and as appointed by Him to succor and defend us on earth; our relation to one another, as all baptised into one body, and all fed with the same words and Sacraments. These relations I call the known. The unknown relation is that between the Angels and those of our own number who are already gone hence; all is uncertainty there; there may or may not be communion; GOD knows, not man. And then the partly-known are the relations between us and the Holy Dead; we know that a connexion is

maintained, yet we know not how; we are sure, induced by potent reasons, that they remember and love us, but we know not how full is their knowledge of what has transpired here since they went away; we feel that they must pray for us, but we know not how, or when, such prayers are offered; we also pray for them, but we know nothing of the effect of our petitions. All this is known in part; and therefore it is intensely fascinating to many who love to muse on deep mysteries, or whose earthly affections, buried long since with some beloved one, have been sublimated into a deeper, fuller and higher love for that same one, in the better land: or else, because all this can only be known in part, it is utterly neglected, ignored and forgotten by others of low and coarse minds, who cling to this present world and care for nothing beyond it.

Such then is that doctrine, grand, intricate, vague, shadowy, yet full of glory also, and precious to the heart of pilgrim man. It elevates his life; it brings the visible and invisible worlds together; it lifts up man by powerful attraction; it gives him fitful gleams of hope and joy on his pilgrimage; he might study, meditate, and pray, all his life long over the sublime truths stored up in this one article of the Christian faith, and grow ever more spiritually minded, more reverent, more calm. We can but glance for a moment at that broad crystal mirror of glorious things; but let us try to remember, and bear with us for all our lives the things we may see there, as in the face of GOD.

It was necessary to take a general view of this subject, before we could dwell on any one branch thereof. For the doctrine of the Communion of Saints covers a very wide field, and includes many truths. But now we may turn to one in particular; to that one which is suggested by this scene and these circumstances; to the question about the relation between the Faithful Departed and us who remain behind, in this world. There is no theme more affecting; not one on which we should speak with more caution.

All that we know about them is what faith accepts: it is purely a matter of faith: sight does not help us. The dear ones go away; they pass from our view; our hearts die down: our eyes are full of tears; we say, "It is all over, and they are departed." Do they yet live? If so, are they aught to us, or we to them? And are we still, in any sense, as ever, one? On these points the teaching is very clear and distinct. It is drawn partly from the written word of GOD; partly from the concurrent belief of His people; and in part it comes to us through the voice of nature, which no man can still. GOD tells us—for however it comes the message is His—that the Departed live, that they are conscious, that they are happy, that they are in Christ, that they are one with us. No real separation occurs, when, in the sight of man they seem to die. There is indeed a local separation, a physical and material one; but really, truly and spiritually, we are with them, and

they with us. Memory and love can never fail. They remember, they love us; they think, and we are in their thoughts; they pray, and we are in their prayers. We are members of the same church, the same household, the same family. One God is father of us all; they have, as we might say, passed out of one room into another in the same building of the Lord; one and the same roof is still over us; they are in a better, brighter quarter of the same great Home and House of Christ, and whatever they are doing, whatever they are beholding, whatever they are enjoying, they never can forget us, nor cease to count the hours of time till we be with them.

Such is, briefly, the teaching of God, speaking to us of this through His holy scriptures, and the Church, and our own hearts. It is a great truth, a very precious truth. How fully do we realize it? With the exception of a few earnest souls, here and there, we hardly realize it at all. Having these great and precious promises and consolations, we have almost utterly cast them away. Who are further from us than the Dead? When they die we are heart-broken. We mourn for a time, and then they begin to fade and fade, more and more, from our thoughts. If they had been annihilated we could hardly entertain more inadequate impressions of them. It is practically as if a wall of blankness, hardness and coldness, had been built up between us. No voice of ours goes through or across it to them, nor

can we hear sound from their side coming to us. We live on, as though whatever the Dead may once have been to us, they are nothing now; mere names, mere shadows, scarce more than myths; persons with whom we once had to do; who are now extinct; seldom to be mentioned; if mentioned, only as we speak of old relics, or lost things that are no longer. It is awful to think how cold, how hollow, how empty, is the void which practically yawns between us and them. It is like total alienation or oblivion. The instant they are removed from our sight, we seem to give them up and let them go; we imply that we have nothing any more to do with them, or they with us; that they are as far beyond the reach of our hearts as of our hands, that we have no duty towards them any more, save to keep their bones from desecration. And though we may stiffly and formally admit that we expect to meet them again, it seems but a theoretic profession, to which not one act on our part corresponds. If they were now annihilated, if the present separation were to be an eternal one, we could not act otherwise than as we do, in hushing up the idea of our loss, in naming them no more, in dropping them out of our prayers, in bearing them no longer in our hearts, when we draw near to GOD. Not one act of ours implies that we believe in our constant and unbroken union with them. We are far behind even the poor heathen, in truth and fidelity to our dead, though we profess to believe that it was Christ who brought life and immortality to light.

I pray you, brethren, bear in mind the contrast between the Faith of the Church and our practice. There are few things more striking than this contrast; between the elevating and consoling truth that they are all living in GOD, that we are with them in Christ, that the whole church this side the vail and beyond it, is one and the same family; and our chill, hard indifference to and neglect of them, their names, their memories, as if death were annihilation, and partings here partings forever, and the separation between us that of hollow, hopeless, voiceless silence never to be broken.

This practical separation between us and the dead in Christ, is one of the misfortunes and calamities of our times; it would be hard to estimate what we must be losing, spiritually, every day we live, in consequence. And if any ask how it has come to pass, the answer is clear. It is the result of banishing them, as has been done, from the devotional exercises of the people of GOD, here on earth. If they be really so very near to us, as GOD says they are, that close and to us most precious intercommunion should be mentioned; it should have its definite expression, and be kept ever before the eyes, and in the ears of us who remain here below. This was done in the Primitive Church in the ancient use of prayers for the departed. For thousands of years, such prayers have been a part of the instituted service of the Lord's people. They were in use among the Israelites, hundreds of years before Christ. They form a part of

the Synagogue and Temple worship, in which the Lord and His apostles took part, when they were here, and are used by the ancient people the same as ever to-day. They are in every liturgy of the ancient Christian Church, known to us at this hour. They were retained in the First Reformed Prayer Book of the Church of England, through reverence for the ancient uses of Christianity. While that order continued, the communion of the Living Saints and Dead had its full expression and statement. It was felt to be a reality. Their beloved and lost ones were more to our fathers, than ours seem to be to us. They named them in the Diptychs; they asked of God rest, light and refreshment to their souls; this made them very near, and kept them like living persons in the thoughts of the survivors. Nor was it until that old, primitive, more than primitive, time-honored, venerable and divinely taught usage had become obscure among us, and all but banished and cast out, that the wall of separation began to rise between us and them, and the air to grow dense, and the bright view into the other world to disappear, and they to fade away and to change, from living and loving brethren, one with us, still, in the best and firmest bonds, into pale, dim ghosts, hovering afar, and waving with feeble hands a long and hopeless farewell.

This was the work done by those who, flying from one series of errors fell into another. They rightly protested against the Romish doctrine concerning Purga-

tory, with its corollaries of masses for the delivery of suffering souls, and indulgences of time to be spent in that place of woe. All those novel inventions they rightly denounced; but in abating them they went too far, and came near utterly silencing the voice of the Church on that subject. They did not quite silence it, for they left a few words in the Prayer for Christ's Church militant, to remind us that the Dead in the Lord still live; but the expressions of the old Christianity are heard among us, in public offices, no more. He who says that this was a great error, has a right to that opinion. In expressing it, also, he will have multitudes on his side. Among those of our own Church who valued and sought to restore the ancient use of that sweet, calm, pure remembrance of the Holy Dead, may be mentioned such men as Archbishop Usher, Jeremy Taylor, Andrews, Wilson, and our own Bishops, Hobart and Wainwright, both of whom published Manuals of Devotion for the people, containing such prayers. I could mention a host of witnesses besides them, but these are good specimens, In them we hear the testimony of the wise and learned on this point. And when we come to the ignorant or the fanatical, how loudly does the voice of nature cry against this exile of our loved and lost, and our self-chosen banishment from them! Hear the Swedenborgian on the one hand, with his crude fancies that the Dead are near; see him drawing the chair, or setting the place at table for some invisible one, or talking to the

vacant air, supposing that a friend is there, unseen. Or hear the vulgar spiritualist, on the other, with his rappings, and mediums, and jugglery, blindly craving for communion with the lost. This is what men come to when they leave GOD'S way, and take their own. Swedenborg and the spirit rappers present the legitimate and inevitable reaction from the work of those, who through fear of Romanism, abandoned the ways of the primitive and undivided church. Truly the dead are very near to us and we to them; which, though we may for a time forget, yet will it come back to us; and if we have lost the truth concerning our relations to them in the Lord, and its due expression in our devotions, we shall end in blindly feeling after them with eager longing and desire, and perhaps be led away by seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, till we fall into all kinds of gross superstition.

But, dear brethren, I would not speak to you in complaining tone; still less as a controversialist. This is not the hour for controversy and dispute; it is the time for calm and soothing reflections. And as the conclusion of the whole matter, let me urge you to strengthen, by all proper means, your faith in our most intimate and happy union with those blessed ones, who die in the Lord. By whatever means that faith can be deepened in your hearts; by reading and study, by reflection, by meditation; let it grow stronger day by day. After all, how very small a part of His Church do we form! We

talk and act as if we alone made up the Holy Catholic Church; whereas, we are but a little fraction of it, while the greater part is beyond, in the better and happier land, with Christ. There is no controversy in that still place; no warring about doctrines, no wrangling about rites; all that uproar belongs to this imperfect world, and forms a part of our disturbed and troubled lives. Must it not be peace to the spirit to think how near we are to that "sweet land of rest?" Must it not be good for us, and an encouragement to perseverance, to think of that Paradise, "where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light?" And if we believe that we and they are so near, must we not speak, and pray, and live, under the influence of that conviction? Yet, such a conviction, to be the governing power that it ought to be, must be based on religious faith, and maintained by religious acts Up to a certain point, and in a certain manner, men may keep the Departed near them: by preserving their pictures, their letters, their poor memorials, and whatever may remind of them, and transmit the knowledge of them to those who shall come after. In this manner History takes care of its great characters, and thus does many an honorable house preserve its ancestral records. But all this care is given to what perishes with the world; it is substantially a process of embalming, which implies an effort to ward off the result of forgetfulness and oblivion. Nothing but Religion can defend and justify, among the survivors, the

Holy Dead; and until we make it a matter of religious duty never to forget them, never to let go of them, to insist that they are not really gone from us, to resolve that nothing shall divide us still farther, or widen the gap which Black Death has made; until it is with us a matter of principle and religious duty to be as loyal, as faithful, as true, as loving towards our beloved ones now, as we were while they were with us, we shall be losing help, comfort and grace, and suffering that moral decline which comes with solitude, selfishness and isolation. Solitary, selfish and isolated indeed must that community be, which is locked up within itself, which never thinks of neighboring folk, and stops its ears to the tidings of other people and other lands, and brethren elsewhere of the same blood. Incredible were it that two men, of the same family, of the same father, should profess to believe in their perfect unity, in their intimate relation to each other, in their common life and interests, and yet never meet, nor seek each other, nor address a word to each other, nor conceive of any reciprocal duties or obligations. Let there be no such alienation in the House of the Lord. We do not see the glorious faces of those who are now walking before Him in the land of the living; but it is a joy to know that they are sometimes turned toward us who sadly wend through this vale of misery. We cannot hear the voices which sound in that distant land, celebrating the praise of God, and singing in wondrous and mystic wise; but

it is a comfort to know that among those utterances come prayers for us, still waiting our release, and that we are helped by those intercessions, as doubtless we are. Shall we not love and remember them? Shall we not in our humility, and ere the race is run, even to the end give thanks to God, also, for the great cloud of witnesses, and long to join their happy band? Let the memory of those who are in Christ before us, be a purifying motive in our actions. Let their names be uttered with joy, as the names of those who live, in a truer sense than we. Let us remember that it is we who are in the shadows and the darkness, not they; let us cling to the idea of our communion with them, as a powerful aid to us, in our effort to lead holy lives. And let the thought of them calm our troubled souls; for soon shall we be where they are, there, "where storms shall cease, and surges swell no more." And oh, what will it be to meet them again, and be with them, after the long weary voyage of this life! I saw three years ago, a great ship come into port, from across the ocean. We waited for her long; but nothing could be seen; mist lay on the waters, hiding the distance from view. At length, close at hand, the vast hull appeared; light foam rippled under the bows; the sun broke forth, the black sides shone in the light: and we saw on deck those whom our hearts loved, their eyes fixed on us, their hands extended in recognition. Thus may we come home at last; and thus may we see them waiting for us on the peaceful

shore: for us, who, though storm-tossed, and greatly vexed with the trials of this life, never forgot or forsook our own, and were glad in knowing that they watched our coming, while heart drew toward heart, more and more powerfully, as the time seemed long, and while the trial of faith and patience made perfect what was imperfect love before. So pass the shadows away! So let the vail be drawn aside! So may we who, though parted for a time are one in Christ forever, be also made one again, in that dear and everlasting home, where the righteous shine forth as the sun, in their Heavenly Father's Realm.

Free Church of S. Mary-the-Virgin,

REVEREND{S THOS. McKEE BROWN, McW. B. NOYES, } *Pastors.*

WEST 45th STREET,

Between Broadway and 8th Ave., New York.

(Broadway, Seventh and Eighth Avenue Cars (three lines) pass the corner.)

Services throughout the Year.

EVERY SUNDAY.

7.00 A.M. Holy Communion.
10.00 A.M. Morning Prayer.
10.45 A.M. Litany—Choral.
11.00 A.M. Holy Communion (and Sermon).
4.00 P.M. Evening Prayer—Choral.
7.30 P.M. Compline and Sermon)—Choral.

EVERY WEEK-DAY.

7.00 A.M. Holy Communion.
9.00 A.M. Morning Prayer (and Litany on Wednesdays and Fridays).
4.30 P.M. Evening Prayer.

SUNDAY SCHOOL.

2.30 P.M. Every Sunday Afternoon.